



Aruba hosts the first Kingdom Conference for the prevention of substance abuse.

Today marked the opening of a conference between Aruba, Holland and the Nederland Antilles to discuss and agree on points for a protocol outlining procedures for prevention and treatment of substance abuse. Over thirty representatives from all branches of the Dutch Kingdom will sit down and discuss the various methods for stemming the tide of this growing problem, not only in the Dutch Kingdom, but throughout the world.

Aruba has a policy of zero tolerance to substance abuse, and is spearheading the efforts to have programs instigated that will not only treat the already addicted, but educate the young and cooperate in efforts to aggressively apprehend and prosecute individuals and organizations that are trafficking in illicit substances. Mr. Eric R. Nassy, Director of Aruba's National Drug Council, in the Office of Abuse Control is optimistic. "My attitude is positive, I believe we are already achieving goals by getting these people together... I believe there will be a positive outcome to this conference. We in Aruba have only been actively pursuing these goals for thirteen years, and already we have a network comparable to the other countries that have been working on these problems for far longer. We are on the right track."

He pointed out that Aruba's shelters for the homeless not only house those with substance abuse problems, but also runaways, the psychologically troubled, and those that have been left homeless for economic reasons. The theme of the conference is "Alone I am weak, together we are less weak."

The Kingdom Conference was officially opened this morning by the Minister of Health and Welfare, the Honorable Booshi Wever. A wide variety of topics will be covered during the seminars that will take place over the next four days, such as "Necessity versus Professionalism and Care," Substance Abuse and the New Caribbean Population, " and "The European Attitude towards Illicit Substances and the effect on the Caribbean."

"As Arubians we are proud of the progress we have made in dealing with substance abuse. When the program started we were only allotted a budget of 800,000 Aruban Florins (\$450,000.) This year the budget is 12,000,000 florins (\$7,000,000.) This shows how committed we are to eradicating this problem."